

Diet for a Healthy Thyroid

When you take a close look at the health problems that have started to skyrocket in this country, an under-functioning thyroid gland shows up as a common denominator in a surprising number of them.

Based on the research I've seen and conducted over the past decade, there are four primary reasons for the growing number of people with an unbalanced thyroid: select mineral deficiencies, heavy metal toxicity, estrogen and estrogen-like compound "pollution" and under-functioning adrenal glands.

If your thyroid gland function needs support, I recommend the following methods for improving your thyroid health:

Eat Selenium-rich Foods:

- Because selenium deficiency is a major factor in low thyroid function, you should regularly include selenium-rich foods in your diet. The thyroid produces several hormones including T3 and T4, and must produce them in a somewhat balanced ratio. Without selenium, this balancing process is hindered.
- Good sources of selenium in your diet, include: wheat germ, seafood and shellfish, beef liver and kidney, eggs, sunflower and sesame seeds, brazil nuts, mushrooms, garlic, onions, and kelp.

Supplement with Iodine:

- The most effective way to maintain thyroid gland function is to supply it with the proper iodine levels necessary for an increase in hormone production. Iodine is essential for the thyroid gland's production of the hormone thyroxin, which the thyroid uses to regulate numerous functions – most importantly metabolism.
- Note: Under no circumstances should you ingest antiseptic or topical iodine. Iodine food supplements are widely available. Start with four drops daily (dissolved in a large glass of water) for the first two weeks, and then reduce the dosage to two drops a day. I like the Genestra brand for quality and efficacy.
- Increase iodine rich foods: such as sea vegetables (kelp, nori, wakame). An easy way to do so is to tear the sheets and add them to salad or a rice bowl. Or sprinkle kelp powder on your foods as a seasoning.
- The best natural occurring source of iodine is saltwater seafood. Freshwater seafood also contains iodine.
- Iodine is added to all table salt in Canada. 1 teaspoon of table salt contains 380 mcg of iodine.
- Kosher, pickling and sea salt are a source of natural iodine but do not contain as much as iodized table salt.

How Much Iodine Should I Aim For?

Age in years	Aim for an intake of* micrograms (mcg)/day	Stay below* mcg/day
Men 19 and Older	150	1100
Women 19 and Older	150	1100
Pregnant Women 19 and Older	220	1100
Breastfeeding Women 19 and Older	290	1100

*This includes sources of iodine from food and supplements.

Iodine Content of Some Common Foods

Food	Serving Size	Iodine (mcg)
Milk and Alternatives		
Cottage cheese	250 mL (1 cup)	65
Yogurt, plain	175 g (¾ cup)	58
Meat and Alternatives		
<i>Meat and Poultry</i>		
Turkey, light, cooked	75 g (2 ½ oz)	30
<i>Organ Meat</i>		
Liver, beef, cooked	75 g (2 ½ oz)	32
<i>Fish and Seafood</i>		
Cod, cooked	75 g (2 ½ oz)	87
Haddock, cooked	75 g (2 ½ oz)	87
Tuna, canned (* not a significant source)	75 g (2 ½ oz)	15
<i>Meat Alternatives</i>		
Beans (navy, black-eyed), cooked	175 mL (¾ cup)	46-53
Egg, cooked	2 large	48-52
Beans (pinto, kidney), cooked	175 mL (¾ cup)	19-28

Adapted from:

Institute of Medicine. Dietary Reference Intakes. Washington: The National Academies Press; 2006 and Pennington, J. and Douglass, J., Bowes and Church's Food Values of Portions Commonly Used, 18 E. Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2005.

Avoid Iodine-Blocking Foods

- Certain foods have a tendency to lower thyroid function and need to be avoided by people with underactive thyroids: soy (including tofu and soymilk), and raw forms of the following vegetables: turnips, mustard greens, broccoli, cabbage, rutabaga, brussels sprouts, bok choy, cress, cauliflower, kale, and kohlrabi.

Cooking these vegetables deactivates the iodine-blocking agent. Unfortunately, I don't know of anything that does the same for the problem with soy.

Supplement with Zinc and Multinutrients

- A common mineral that improves thyroid health in middle-aged and elderly men and women is zinc. Adequate levels are required for proper thyroid hormone metabolism. As we age, both thyroid problems and zinc deficiencies become more common.

Recommended dosages generally range from 30 – 50 mg of zinc (elemental) per day. Keep in mind that it may take months for oral zinc supplementation to affect a chronic thyroid problem.

- Finally, a good multinutrient will include proper levels of important trace elements, such as selenium (200 mcg daily) and zinc (20 mg daily).

Reduce Your Exposure to Estrogen-like Compounds

- Xenoestrogens make their way into the body through respiration, ingestion of contaminated food, and skin contact. Once in the body, they block thyroid hormone production and contribute to low thyroid function.
- I recommend that you use organic cleansers, pesticides and other household products. And make the switch once and for all to distilled water.
- Our body's own estrogen can interfere with thyroid hormone activity – a condition that is very common in women, called estrogen dominance, can result block activity of T4 and T3. Signs of estrogen dominance include heavy periods, endometriosis, ovarian cysts, strong PMS, shortened cycles (21 days), long periods, fibroids. Eating a diet that helps balance estrogen and reduces dairy products, meats (especially those of both categories that are not organic), sugar and one that emphasizes the consumption of fiber rich foods, legumes, vegetables, and probiotic-rich foods (organic plain yogurt, kefir and fermented foods like kombucha, kimchi, sauerkraut) are all also beneficial. (see also handout on Balancing Estrogen)

Support your adrenal glands

- Imbalances in cortisol may also lead to poor thyroid activity. Adrenal fatigue can inhibit T4 to T3 conversion (T3 is the more active form of thyroid hormone) and can also encourage the formation of a molecule called reverseT3 (rT3) from T4 instead. rT3 acts as the body's "brakes", and results in fatigue as our body's way of telling us to slow down!
- A diet for healthy adrenals includes mineral and B vitamin rich foods, such as nuts and seeds (raw), whole grains, legumes. Animal meat is the best source of the B vitamin B12.
- The adrenals are rapidly depleted by refined foods/ carbohydrates and sugar as well as caffeine and alcohol. These should be avoided.

GENERAL DIETARY GUIDELINES

1. Eat dinner no less than 4 hours before bedtime.
2. Eating slowly and chewing well, when you are calm and relaxed, greatly increases the absorption of nutrients from your food and keeps you healthy.
3. Eat certified organic fruits, vegetables and meats.
4. Eat a wide variety of fresh whole (not processed) foods.
5. Aim for high quality proteins at every meal. This is essential for good health. This means tempeh, beans, peas, fish, organic chicken and meat. No “mystery meats” like luncheon slices, spam, hot dogs, fake meats, and tofu dogs. Fresh is best, but canned fish is okay (salmon is better than tuna).
6. Cooking methods:
 - a. Best: sauté in olive oil at low temperature, steaming, baking, stirfry quickly at high temperature.
 - b. Worst: high-fat deep frying (clogs arteries), boiling (decreases vitamins), barbecuing (creates cancer-causing agents), microwaving.
7. Eat 100% vegetarian at least 1 day per week (but keep up the protein!).

ALWAYS:

- Fresh fruit (before or between meals)
- Fresh vegetables – especially greens, broccoli, cabbage, Brussel sprouts, beets, red and yellow vegetables, salads with home-made dressing
- Olive oil – extra virgin
- Plain yogurt – make sure it says “live bacterial culture” on the label – can add honey and fruit
- Cold water fish (wild, not farmed) – salmon, mackerel, herring, cod, sardines
- Organic chicken & meats
- Whole cooked grains, - brown rice, buckwheat/ kasha, quinoa, amaranth, millet, oats
- Beans – soak overnight and change water
- Nuts and seeds – raw, not roasted or salted, keep in freezer
- High fiber foods – dried fruit, greens
- Onions and garlic – prevent heart disease
- Sprouts – fresh
- Water! 1.5 – 2 litres per day
- Green tea – high anti-oxidant
- Herbal teas
- Milk – almond, rice, oat, hemp
- Sea vegetables (kelp, nori, arame)

SOMETIMES:

- Butter (organic)
- Red wine
- Tofu and tempeh (may have mild goitrogenic activity)
- Organic natural cheeses, goat cheese
- Eggs
- Shellfish
- Sea salt
- Home-made cookies with natural sweetener as below
- Honey, maple syrup, sorghum, molasses
- Cow’s milk (organic)
- Juices
- Whole grain breads (not wheat) like spelt, kamut, rice
- Home-made muffins
- 100% whole rye crackers
- Coffee and Tea – regular and decaffeinated (organic)

NOT RECOMMENDED:

- Margarine
- Deep fried foods
- Vegetable oils – corn, peanut, canola (high GMO)
- Colas
- Sugar, glucose – fructose
- Fake stuff – artificial sweeteners, artificial colors, artificial flavors
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Fake meats
- Packaged cookies, crackers, snacks, sauces, dinners
- Alcohol (except red wine)
- Peanut butter – contains aflatoxin molds which are carcinogenic
- Bacon and other smoked meats.
- White bread
- Whole grain, wheat bread
- White pasta
- White rice

**Avoid mucous-forming foods when you have a cold or during hay fever season including all cow and goat dairy products (milk, cheese, butter, yogurt), bananas and orange juice.